

# Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday, April 29, 2026 – First Baptist Church Buda  
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study



## COLOSSIANS: ROOTED IN CHRIST – PART 2 *“Authentic Christianity”* *Colossians 1:3-8*

*“<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, <sup>2</sup>To the saints and faithful brethren in Christ who are in Colosse: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*”

*“<sup>3</sup>We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, <sup>8</sup>who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” – Colossians 1:1-8 (NKJV)*

### **BIBLICAL BACKGROUND FOR COLOSSIANS**

The following is some of the general background information for the book of Colossians. In this introductory we get into more background information and hammer some important details, but lets begin with some generals for the book...

### **Some General Background Information for Colossians:**

- (1) **AUTHOR = The Apostle Paul** - The apostle Paul, joined in his salutation by Timothy (Col 1:1), and signed by Paul himself at the end of the letter (Col 4:18). Early sources in church history that attribute this letter to Paul include: Eusebius (300 A.D.), Origen (250 A.D.), Clement of Alexandria (200 A.D.), Tertullian (200 A.D.), Irenaeus (200 A.D.), and the Muratorian Fragment (180 A.D.)
- (2) **TYPE OF LITERATURE/WRITING = Letter/Epistle (possibly circular)** -
- (3) **SETTING = The City of Colosse** - The city was located about 100 miles east of Ephesus in Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). Together with Hieropolis (Col 4:13) and Laodicea (Col 2:1; 4:13-16; Re 3:14-22), Colosse made up a tri-city area. Each city had its own distinction:
- **Hierapolis, a place for health, pleasure, and relaxation**
  - **Laodicea, known for its commercial trade and politics**
  - **Colosse, known simply as a small town**
- Colosse was mostly a pagan city, with a strong intermingling of Jews (in 62 B.C., there were 11,000 Jewish freemen in the tri-city area). This may explain the nature of some of the problems that arose among the church in Colosse (problems with both pagan and Jewish origin)
- (4) **RECEIPIENTS = The Church at Colosse** - The establishment of the church is uncertain. At issue is whether Paul himself had ever been there. Some suggest that Paul may have done some work there during his third journey, on the way to Ephesus (cf. Ac 18:23; 19:1). Others point out that Paul's comments imply that he had not personally been in Colosse (cf. Col 2:1). One possibility is that the church was established during Paul's extended stay at Ephesus, where the effect of his work spread throughout Asia Minor (cf. Ac 19:8-10). It may not have been Paul himself, but one of his co-workers who went out to Colosse. Paul's remarks in the epistle indicate that Epaphras was the one who preached the gospel there (Col 1:5-8) and in Hierapolis and Laodicea (Col 4:12-13). Though he was with Paul at the time the epistle was written, Epaphras is identified as "one of you" (Col 4:12), suggesting that he may have originally been from . Colosse. Other members of the church at Colosse included Philemon, Apphia, and Archippus, who may have been father, mother, and son. By comparing the epistle to the Colossians with that written to Philemon, it is reasonable to suppose that the church at Colosse met in their home (cf. Col 4:17 with Phe 1-2, and the references to Archippus). If Philemon and his family were hosts of the church at Colosse, then Onesimus (Philemon's slave) would have also been a member there upon his return (cf. Col 4:7-9 with Phe 8-16)
- (5) **PLACE OF WRITING = A Roman prison** - Colossians is one of Paul's four "prison epistles" (Col 4:18; cf. Ephesians, Philippians, and Philemon). The general consensus is that these epistles were written during Paul's imprisonment at Rome (cf. Ac 28:16,30-31).
- (6) **DATE = 61-63 A.D. (Dated by Paul's Roman imprisonment)** - If such is truly the case, then Paul wrote Colossians around 61-63 A.D. from Rome. The indication is that the epistles

to the Colossians, Philemon and the Ephesians were carried to their destination by Tychicus and Onesimus (cf. Col 4:7-9; Phile 10-12; Ep 6:21-22)

(7) **PURPOSE OF WRITING = False teaching** - Paul had received a report of the situation at Colosse by way of Epaphras (**Col 1:7-8**). This report was for the most part favorable (**Col 2:5**). But the subject matter in the epistle strongly suggests that the church was facing a two-fold danger:

- The danger of relapse into paganism with its gross immorality (cf. **Col 1:21-23; 2:6; 3:5-11**)
- The danger of accepting what has been come to known as "**The Colossian heresy**". This heresy was a syncretism involving four elements of both pagan and Jewish origin:
  - **Philosophies of men** - which denied the all sufficiency and pre-eminence of Christ (**Col 2:8**)
  - **Judaistic ceremonialism** - which attached special significance to the rite of circumcision, food regulations, and observance of special days (**Col 2:11,16-17**)
  - **Angel worship** - which detracted from the uniqueness of Christ (**Col 2:18**)
  - **Asceticism** - which called for harsh treatment of the body as the means to control its lusts (**Col 2:20-23**)

To guard against these dangers, Paul writes to: Warn the Colossians against relapse (**Col 1:21-23**), Warn them against the "solution" being urged upon them by those denying the all-sufficiency of Christ (**Col 2:8-23**), Direct their attention to the "Beloved Son", the "All-Sufficient and Pre-Eminent Savior" (**Col 1:13-18; 2:8-10**)

(8) **THEME OF THE WRITING = The Sufficiency of Christ** - With the focus on Jesus Christ as the answer to the "Colossian heresy", the theme of this letter is clearly: CHRIST - THE FULNESS OF GOD, AND THE PRE-EMINENT, ALL-SUFFICIENT SAVIOR

(9) **THEME VERSE = Colossians 2:6-7 "Rooted in Christ"** - *"**As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him,<sup>7</sup> rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.**"*

(10) **KEY VERSE = Colossians 2:9-10, "The Sufficiency of Christ"** - *"**For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.**"*



I mention small towns because Colossae was a small town, about 100 miles east of Ephesus in western Asia Minor (modern Turkey). It was about 10 miles from Laodicea and 13 miles from Hieropolis. Colossae had once been a fairly important town, but the trade route had shifted to go through Laodicea so that by Paul's day, its importance had dwindled. The population was mostly Gentile, but a sizeable Jewish population had settled there several centuries before. Dr. J.B. Lightfoot wrote, "Without doubt Colossae was the least important church to which any epistle of St. Paul was addressed." It would be as if in our day Paul wrote an inspired letter to a little church on the back streets of Buda... FBC Buda.

So you have to ask, "Why would Paul write to this relatively insignificant church?" The answer is that this small town church had some big time doctrinal threats to its well-being. We can be thankful for this problem, because it prompted Paul to write this wonderful little letter that sets forth the supremacy and all-sufficiency of Christ more forcefully than in any of his other letters.

- Paul had not yet visited Colossae personally (Col. 2:1).
- The church there had been planted by Epaphras, a native (Col. 1:7; 4:12)
- Epaphras was probably converted and discipled during Paul's extended stay in Ephesus (Acts. 19:10).
- Epaphras also probably planted churches in Laodicea and Hieropolis (Col. 4:13).
- The church in Colossae met in the home of Philemon (Philem. 2), whose runaway slave, Onesimus, had met Paul and Christ during Paul's Roman imprisonment.
- Paul sent Onesimus back to Philemon, urging him to forgive and welcome back his runaway slave as a brother in Christ.
- But the church in Colossae was being plagued by false teaching, and Epaphras was not sure how to deal with it.
- So he went to Rome and found Paul, who was under house arrest in his own quarters (Acts. 28:30-31).
- In response, Paul wrote Colossians and then probably expanded it into the letter to the Ephesians. Both epistles are similar in structure and content, but in Colossians the emphasis is on Christ as the head of the church, whereas in Ephesians it's on the church as the body of Christ, the head. Colossians is much more focused in attacking the false doctrine that was infiltrating that church, whereas Ephesians is more general.
- Some scholars think that Ephesians may have been a circular letter, intended for several churches in Asia Minor. If so, it could be the letter coming from Laodicea that Paul mentions in Colossians 4:16. If not, then the letter to Laodicea is a lost letter, which in God's sovereignty was not intended to be included in the New Testament. At the same time, Paul also wrote the short letter to Philemon and probably sent all three letters back with Tychicus (Eph. 6:21; Col. 4:7), while Epaphras stayed with him in Rome.

## APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What are some practical strategies for a grumbling (complaining, critical, touchy, irritable) Christian to grow into a thankful one?
2. Discuss: The difference between a Jehovah's Witness and a true Christian is not faith, but the content or object of that faith.
3. Is there a difference between loving and liking fellow Christians? Must we *like* all Christians?
4. How can Christians in comfortable circumstances develop a stronger hope of heaven?

## AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANITY (Colossians 1:3-8)

A bishop who had just had a cup of tea with a parishioner commented, "I'm glad to see in what a comfortable way you are living." The churchgoer replied, "Oh, bishop, if you want to know how we really live, you need to come when you're not here." (*Reader's Digest* [3/84], p. 16)

Unfortunately, a lot of Christians live that way, keeping up a good front to impress others with their spirituality. But if you knew how they really live, you'd find that they are faking it. They don't live as authentic Christians. We all value authenticity, especially when it comes to our faith. But how can we know if our faith is genuine? What are the marks of authentic Christianity?

Many of the Colossian Christians had been unsettled by some false teachers who had arisen in their midst.

- They were telling these relatively new believers that they needed to observe designated holy days, avoid certain foods, and keep certain rules in order to be spiritual (to be truly saved and made right with God).
- They implied that the gospel which Epaphras had taught the Colossians was not complete or accurate.
- They needed to add the insights and rules of the false teachers to be genuine believers.
- **What is wrong with this particular type of false or erroneous teaching (idea)... *that you can only be saved by observing certain customs, practices, or duties?***
- **Why is this teaching particularly dangerous?**
- **Is there any evidence that this idea might be promoted or subtly taught in churches today? *Cite examples...***

Paul wrote to the church to assure them that the gospel they previously received through Epaphras was the genuine item. It proved its authenticity by the fruit that it had produced in

them and was producing in others everywhere it went. In so doing, Paul emphasized, as he often did, three virtues that are essentials of authentic Christianity...

### **3 Essential Virtues of Authentic Christianity:**

- (1) **Faith** in Jesus Christ
- (2) **Love** for other believers
- (3) **Hope** of heaven.

Also, in Paul's opening comments, he reflects the authentic Christian virtues of thankfulness and prayer. Putting it together, we learn that ...

***KEY THOUGHT: Authentic Christians are marked by thankfulness and prayer, faith in Christ, love for the saints, and the hope of heaven.***

It's obvious that the Colossians were very different after they heard and believed the gospel which Epaphras preached. ***If people have not changed, we can assume that either the true gospel was not preached or that it was not believed.*** What is your reaction to that statement? What is the statement saying? Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why (explain)?

Belief in the true gospel results in the changes that Paul himself embodied and that he mentions here. Let explore deeper each of the above mentioned essentials spelled on that that key thought...

### **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS ARE MARKED BY THANKFULNESS AND PRAYER**

Colossians 1:3, “<sup>3</sup>*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you...*” Paul had not yet met these new believers, but when he heard Epaphras' report, he welled up with thankfulness to God for how these mostly Gentile former pagans had responded. As a result, he and Timothy (“we”) began to remember them often in their prayers.

<sup>3</sup>*We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints...*”

### **What this simple statement teaches us about salvation...**

1. **God alone is author and giver of salvation** - The fact that Paul thanked God for the Colossians' salvation shows that he believed that God alone is the author and giver of salvation. Paul said it in Ephesians 2:8-9, “<sup>8</sup>*For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not of works, lest anyone should boast.*”

2. **Salvation is not the result of man's efforts or works** - If as some teach, salvation is the result of sinners exercising their free will, then Paul would have congratulated the Colossians for making such a wise choice, much like a waiter will tell you when you give him your order, "Excellent choice!" I always feel like telling the waiter, "I'm glad that you recognize my culinary genius!"

### **Why is it important to understand salvation is "not by works"?**

*"For it is by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is the gift of God, not by works, so that no one can boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)*

#### **(1) Works change everything** - Why "Not by Works" Changes Everything

- God gets all the glory—none of it can stick to us.
- Salvation rests on grace that never shifts, instead of on performance that always does.
- Boasting is silenced, humility is born, unity in the church is protected.
- Assurance becomes possible: if works did not purchase salvation, failed works cannot forfeit it.
- Freedom is released for genuine good works that flow from gratitude, not fear.

#### **(2) Clear teaching of Scripture** - Scripture Echoes That Drive the Point Home

- Romans 3:20 — "Therefore no one will be justified in His sight by works of the law..."
- Titus 3:5 — "He saved us, not by works of righteousness we had done, but according to His mercy..."
- Isaiah 64:6 — "All our righteous acts are like filthy rags..."
- Galatians 2:16 — "A person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ..."

All reinforce the same melody: grace alone saves.

#### **(3) Dangers of works based salvation** - What's at Stake When We Forget

- We drift into legalism, measuring acceptance by spiritual mileage.
- Joy evaporates under the weight of "never enough."
- The finished work of Christ ("It is finished," John 19:30) gets treated as merely started.

Not only that... work can never save you therefore you remain lost, separated from God and hell bound

#### **(4) Benefits to "not by works" salvation** - The Right Response to Free Grace

- Rest—Hebrews 4:10 calls believers to cease from their own works.
- Thanksgiving—Psalm 116:12-13 asks, "How can I repay the LORD...? I will lift the cup of salvation."
- Eager obedience—Ephesians 2:10 follows immediately: "For we are His workmanship...prepared in advance for us to do." Works are fruit, not root.

#### **(5) The daily practice of living a "not by works" salvation** - Living It Out

- Preach the gospel to yourself daily: Christ's merit, not mine.
- Reject comparison games; grace levels the field.

- Serve energetically, knowing love, not labor, motivates.
- When you fail, run to the cross, not the treadmill.

Salvation is a gift, pure and simple—understanding that keeps the soul light, the heart humble, and the hands ready for every good work.

**3. Salvation come only by faith as God opens our hearts to respond** - Paul knew that when people responded in faith to the gospel, it was because God had opened their hearts to respond (Acts 16:14). Thus it is appropriate to thank God when He works the miracle of the new birth into dead sinners' hearts.

- In line with this, if God is not sovereign in saving sinners, then you're wasting your time to pray that lost people would be saved.
- If God is not able to change the hearts of stubborn, self-willed sinners by giving them new life, then when you pray for their salvation, God's answer would be, "I'd like to see them saved, too, but it's not up to Me; it's up to them and what they do. But I'm with you—I sure hope that they decide for Me!"
- But if God is mighty to save, then we can and should pray for the salvation of the lost and give thanks when it happens.
- Prayer for the salvation of the lost is implied when the Lord directs us to pray (Matt. 6:10), "*Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*"
- For God's kingdom to come on earth, people must be converted and come under the lordship of the king.

## **THANKFULNESS AND PRAYER ARE MAJOR THEMES IN THIS SHORT LETTER.**

### **3 Verses/Passage that Highlight the Theme of "Thankfulness" in Colossians:**

- (1) **Colossians 1:12** - In Colossians 1:12, Paul says that we are to be joyously <sup>12</sup> *giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the Light.*
- (2) **Colossians 2:7** - In Colossians 2:7, he says that we are to be *"rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you were taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving."*
- (3) **Colossians 3:15-17** = In Colossians 3:15-17 Paul says, <sup>15</sup> *And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful.* <sup>16</sup> *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace (or thankfulness) in your hearts to the Lord.* <sup>17</sup> *And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.* He exhorts the church to "be thankful," to sing "with thankfulness in your hearts to God," and to do everything "in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father."

The other major theme in Colossians, besides “thankfulness” is prayer. Another theme that pops up throughout the letter...

#### **4 Verses/Passage that Highlight the Theme of “Prayerfulness” in Colossians:**

- (1) **Colossians 1:3** – Paul mentioned in his opening statement of his letter, *“We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you.”* He starts the letter off by mentioning his constant prayer for the Colossians, emphasizing the importance of prayer.
- (2) **Colossians 1:9-12** – In Colossians 1:9-12 Paul writes, *“<sup>9</sup> For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; <sup>10</sup> that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; <sup>11</sup> strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; <sup>12</sup> giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.”* Concerning prayer, in addition to Paul mentioning his constant prayers for the Colossians (1:3), in 1:9-12 he specifies the content of his prayers.
- (3) **Colossians 4:2** – Paul says in Colossians 4:2, *“Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.”* In Colossians 4:2, he combines prayer and thanksgiving when he commands, *“Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.”*
- (4) **Colossians 4:12** – In Colossians 4:12 Paul writes, *“Epaphras, who is one of you, a bondservant of Christ, greets you, always laboring fervently for you in prayers, that you may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.”* And in Colossians 4:12, he reports that Epaphras was “always laboring earnestly for you in his prayers, that you may stand perfect and fully assured in all the will of God.”

If, like me, you’re prone to grumble, get irritated, and gripy... about minor irritations and frustrations that pop up just about every day, I hope that you can see that grumbling and thankful prayer are opposites! In fact, thankful prayer is the antidote for grumbling. The next time you find yourself grumbling about something, stop, confess it to the Lord, and instead, by faith thank Him for bringing this irritation into your life so that you can learn to trust Him and rely more fully on Him through prayer. Thankfulness and prayer are marks of authentic Christianity.

The reason Paul thanks God is because he sees in the Colossian church the common triad of Christian virtues: their faith in Christ Jesus, their love for all the saints, and the hope laid up in heaven for them, as contained in the gospel which Epaphras had preached to them. Faith, hope, and love are mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13:13; 1 Thessalonians 1:3; 5:8; Romans 5:1-5; Galatians 5:5, 6; Ephesians 1:15, 18; 4:2-5; and, Hebrews 6:10-12; 10:22-24. One writer says that they are a sort of “apostolic shorthand” for genuine Christianity. Let’s look at each of these three virtues:

## **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS ARE MARKED BY FAITH IN JESUS CHRIST, WHICH INCLUDES UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL**

### **2 Things that Mark Authentic Christians:**

- 1. Authentic Christians are marked by understanding of the Gospel**
- 2. Authentic Christians are marked by faith in Christ Jesus Himself**

..

Now let's flesh out each of these and see if we can't get at what we mean by each of these...

### **Authentic Christians are marked by understanding the gospel...**

Some claim to believe in Jesus, but if you asked them to explain the gospel, they would not be able to do it. But to have genuine faith in Christ, you must understand the gospel...

### ***What is the gospel? Be specific***

### **What is the gospel? 3 Characteristics of the Gospel:**

**(1) The gospel is good news** - "Gospel" means "good news." I mention this so that we're not just throwing around Christian jargon without considering its meaning.

- The Christian message is not primarily an ethical or moral code, but rather good news to those who deserve God's judgment.
- As the angel announced to the shepherds on the night that Jesus was born (Luke 2:10), *"Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."*

To understand that good news, we first must understand the bad news...

- We all have sinned and deserve God's righteous judgement.
- We stand before God guilty and condemned and we cannot save ourselves. That's why we need a Savior.
- And Jesus, the eternal God who took on human flesh through the virgin birth, is the Savior whom God sent to bear our punishment on the cross.
- The good news is that God offers salvation as a free gift to every sinner who does not work for it, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5).

There is no better news in the world than that!

**(2) The gospel has content** - It is God's *"word of truth"* (Col. 1:5). Through Epaphras the Colossians had previously heard it, learned it, and understood it *"in truth."* This last

phrase probably means that the Colossians truly or authentically understood the message that Epaphras had proclaimed to them.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones makes the point, “The gospel does not first come to us through our heart, our emotions, or our will, but rather to our minds or understanding.”

This runs contrary to so much modern evangelism...

- A person goes to an evangelistic meeting where after some stirring music and heartwarming testimonies the evangelist gives an emotional appeal of how Christ can help the person with her difficult marriage or his alcohol addiction.
- Then he calls on those who want to invite Jesus into their lives to make a decision by raising their hands or coming forward.
- But he has not made clear the content of the gospel.
- Rather, it’s an appeal to the emotions or to the will that bypasses the mind.
- Often such appeals result in false converts who were moved emotionally at the moment, but they did not understand the content of the gospel.
- Before the gospel can be believed or accepted it must be learned and understood.

We must understand something of who God is...

- He is “the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Col. 1:3).
- In verse 8, Paul also mentions the Holy Spirit, which shows that he had a trinitarian understanding of God’s nature (see 2 Cor. 13:14; Eph. 1:3, 5, 13).
- When He was on this earth, Jesus Christ relied on, submitted to, and revealed to us His heavenly Father.
- As Jesus, He is fully man.
- As the Lord, He is fully God, one with the Father (John 10:30).
- As the Christ, He is God’s Anointed One, the Savior whom God promised as the descendant of David (Psalms 2, 110).
- He came to offer Himself as the perfect sacrifice, the fulfillment of all the Old Testament sacrifices, sufficient to satisfy God’s wrath so that He could justly forgive all our sins.
- Paul also describes the gospel as “the grace of God” (Col. 1:6).
- Grace is central and essential to the gospel.
- It means that we are sinners who rightly deserve God’s judgment.
- But it also means that because Jesus paid the penalty we deserve, God can be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).
- Thus Paul could write (Eph. 2:8-9), *“For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

So when you share the gospel, make sure that you make the content of the gospel clear. The Holy Spirit must open the mind of the lost person so that he can truly understand the

grace of God (1 Cor. 2:14). And the Spirit must grant faith to that lost person so that he can stop trusting in his good works and believe the good news of God's grace in Christ Jesus. The gospel is good news that contains specific truth content.

**(3) The gospel is powerful to save sinners** - The Colossians were mostly Gentile pagans, vainly living for the lusts of the flesh, when the gospel came to them. But when God opened their minds to understand, their hearts to respond and their wills to believe, they were dramatically changed. But this powerful change wasn't unique in Colossae. Paul tells them (Col. 1:6) that *"in all the world also it is constantly bearing fruit and increasing."* He did not mean (here or in Col. 1:23) that the gospel had gone out to every people group in the world at that time. Rather, he is emphasizing that the gospel was not restricted to the Jews. Rather, it was spreading all over the Roman Empire with the same powerful results.

As Paul wrote in Romans 1:16, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."*

"Bearing fruit and increasing" (v.6) may point to the internal and external aspects of the gospel's power. Internally, the gospel bears the fruit of the Spirit in the lives of believers. It gradually but inevitably changes their thinking and behavior.

Externally, the gospel increases as transformed believers tell others the good news. Paul emphasizes this powerful effect of the gospel to underscore its authenticity. The true gospel that Epaphras had proclaimed in Colossae had changed their lives and also the lives of others as it spread around the Roman Empire. Authentic Christians understand and believe Christ's gospel.

### **Authentic Christians are marked by faith in Christ Jesus Himself...**

Paul had heard of the Colossians' *"faith in Christ Jesus."* The Greek construction here may emphasize faith "in the sphere of" Christ, meaning that He is "the sphere in which 'faith' lives and acts"

- In other words, our faith must be in all that Christ is and all that He did for us on the cross.
- But saving faith is always in the person of Jesus Christ, not just in doctrines about Him
- Faith has no merit in itself, but rather is only as valid as its object.
- You can have all the faith in the world in a defective airplane, but that won't make the plane fly or get you to your destination.

NOTE: Many in the cults claim to have faith in Jesus, but their "Jesus" is a false Jesus who was conceived by the cult founder. He is not the Jesus revealed in the apostolic testimony of the New Testament.

- Our faith must be in the Jesus revealed in Scripture.
- But the point here is that we are not only to believe correct teaching about Jesus Christ, but also to believe in Christ Himself.
- He alone is our Savior.
- Thus authentic Christians are marked by thankfulness and prayer and by faith in Christ and His gospel.

## **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS ARE MARKED BY LOVE FOR ALL THE SAINTS**

Often Paul couples faith and love as genuine indicators of conversion...

- Ephesians 1:15 – *“<sup>15</sup> Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 1:3 – *“<sup>3</sup> Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father.”*
- 1 Thessalonians 3:6 – *“<sup>6</sup> But now that Timothy has come to us from you, and brought us good news of your faith and love, and that you always have good remembrance of us, greatly desiring to see us, as we also to see you—”*
- 2 Thessalonians 1:3 – *“<sup>3</sup> We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is fitting, because your faith grows exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all abounds toward each other.”*
- 1 Timothy 1:14 – *“<sup>14</sup> And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”*
- 2 Timothy 1:13 – *“<sup>13</sup> Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.”*
- Philemon 5 – *“<sup>5</sup> Hearing of your love and faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints.”*
- Galatians 5:6 – *“For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but faith working through love.”*

While faith is essential for beginning a relationship with Jesus Christ, it is worthless if it does not result in love for others, especially for “all the saints”... in other words “each other.”

### ***Love is the distinguishing mark of Christians***

As Jesus said in John 13:34-35, *“<sup>34</sup> A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*

### ***Authentic Christian love is “in the Spirit”***

*“<sup>3</sup>We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, <sup>8</sup>who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” – Colossians 1:3-8 (NKJV)*

Did you see it there in verse 8... authentic Christian love is “in the Spirit”... which means that the Holy Spirit produces this love as His fruit in believers. The flesh is basically self-serving, resulting in the deeds of the flesh, which include (Gal. 5:20-21), “enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these.”

But Paul describes the love which the Spirit produces in us **1 Corinthians 13:4-7**...

*“<sup>4</sup> Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; <sup>6</sup> does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; <sup>7</sup> bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”*

I encourage you to memorize those words in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 and read them over and over until they influence your relationships with your family and friend... with those in this church. If relationships were perfect or ideal, we wouldn't need the repeated commands to love one another. These commands imply that we've got to work continually on our relationships. Love would not need to be patient if the other person were not irritating you. It would not need to be kind or not jealous or not provoked if the other person always acted in a loving way toward you. We all must battle the flesh daily by denying self and seeking the other person's highest good. Sacrificial love for others, just as Jesus loved us, is an essential mark of authentic Christianity. Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:1-2**, *“Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. <sup>2</sup> And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.”*

➡ **Dr. John Piper** says this about the difference between Christian love and the worlds love... *“The difference between secular love and Christian love is that secular love is not rooted in the cross of God's Son, and is not sustained and shaped by the power of God's Spirit, and is not acted for the glory of God the Father. So the source of it is different, the sustaining power of it is different, and the goal of it is different. Let's think about each of these one at a time and see if we can live it out.” – Dr. John Piper, Desiring God*

**Respond to this quote from Dr. John Piper:**  
**Do you agree or disagree with his statement?**

*What do you think he is saying?*

*What is the source, power, goal of the world's (secular) love?*

*What is the source, power, goal of Christian love?*

**Christian love, often referred to as "agape" love, is characterized by selflessness, sacrifice, and a commitment to the well-being of others, reflecting the teachings and example of Jesus Christ.**

### **Characteristics of Authentic Christian Love**

- (1) **Selflessness and sacrifice** – Christian love is rooted in the sacrificial love of Jesus, who laid down His life for humanity (John 15:13). This love is not self-centered but seeks the highest good for others, often requiring personal sacrifice.
- (2) **Patience and kindness** – As described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, love is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast, and it is not proud or rude. This means that Christian love is characterized by a gentle and understanding approach toward others, even in challenging situations.
- (3) **Forgiveness** – Forgiveness is a crucial aspect of Christian love. Believers are called to forgive others as God forgave them (Colossians 3:13). This reflects a willingness to let go of grievances and extend grace to others.
- (4) **Action-oriented** – Christian love is not merely an emotion but is demonstrated through actions. James 2:15-17 emphasizes that faith without action is dead, urging believers to meet the physical and emotional needs of others.
- (5) **Compassion and service** – Jesus exemplified love through His compassion for the marginalized and His willingness to serve others. Christian love involves actively seeking to help those in need and showing empathy towards others.

### **AUTHENTIC CHRISTIANS ARE MARKED BY THE HOPE OF HEAVEN**

*<sup>3</sup>We give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, <sup>4</sup>since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of your love for all the saints; <sup>5</sup>because of the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, of which you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel, <sup>6</sup>which has come to you, as it has also in all the world, and is bringing forth fruit, as it is also among you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth; <sup>7</sup>as you also learned from Epaphras, our dear fellow servant, who is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf, <sup>8</sup>who also declared to us your love in the Spirit.” – Colossians 1:3-8 (NKJV)*

Colossians 1:5, “...because of the hope which is laid up for your in heaven, of which you heard before in the world of the truth of the gospel.” Grammatically, the phrase, “because of the hope,” could go all the way back to verse 3, meaning, “We give thanks to God ... because of the hope laid up for you in heaven.” Or, it may refer back to faith and love, meaning that their faith and love spring from their hope of heaven (the NIV translates it with this sense). Or, it could refer to love only as springing from their hope.

Probably the best way to understand it is that their faith and love were because of their common hope of heaven. Before Epaphras preached the gospel to them, they had no hope and were **“without God in the world”** (Eph. 2:12). But the gospel brought the hope (or promise) of heaven and on account of this hope, they believed in Christ and grew in love for one another. “Hope” here does not refer to the act of hoping, but rather to the objective content of hope, namely, God’s promise of heaven for all who believe in Jesus. Since we’re going to be spending eternity with our brothers and sisters in Christ, we’d better learn to love one other now!

I realize, of course, that in heaven all the saints will be perfectly sanctified, so it will be easier to love them than it is now. While we’re all in the process of sanctification, the saints (including myself!) all have some rough edges. Thus some realistic wise guy wrote, **“To dwell above with the saints we love, O that will be glory! But to dwell below with the saints we know, well that’s a different story!”** But, difficult as it may be, our hope of heaven should motivate us to grow in love for all of God’s redeemed people.

But the point here is, the foundation for faith and love is our hope for heaven. That hope is certain, laid up for us, because it’s based on the promises of God, who cannot lie; but it’s not yet realized. I’m convinced, however, that as American Christians, who live pretty well in this world, we live too much for this world and not enough for the world to come. The apostle Paul wrote (1 Cor. 15:19), **“If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.”** Can you say that? One Puritan writer put it, **“Were earthly comforts permanent, who would look for heavenly?”** I’m sure that our persecuted brothers and sisters around the world have their hope in heaven, not in the things of this world. To the extent that we sense how fleeting and how uncertain life is, we will put our hope in the salvation that is laid up for us in heaven.

### **Things the Bible Says About Hope... The Hope of Authentic Christianity:**

- (1) **Authentic Christian hope is never lost** – Sometimes it’s difficult to see hope in a situation. But, the Bible says that true hope is unseen. And if we can be hopeful for one thing, such as our salvation, which is also unseen, then we can be hopeful for other things too. It’s just that simple! *“For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have?” Romans 8:24*
- (2) **Authentic Christians can be confident in hope** - We have now understood that hope is unseen. But, if it’s unseen, can we trust it? After all, we can trust the chair we sit in or the mug we pour our coffee into because we can see it. Likewise, there are things that we can trust without seeing. We can trust that our insurance company will cover a certain amount of losses or that baking cookies will leave a wonderful aroma in our kitchen. We are confident in them because these are legal and natural laws. In the same way, although we can’t see it, we can be full of hope. Hope assures us that we can be confident in it

because it's the law of God. *"Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."* Hebrews 11:1

- (3) Authentic Christian hope comes from God** - Sometimes we hope for things in which there is no hope. A car can't bring true hope; it can bring a feeling of contentment and exhilaration, but not real hope. Financial stability can't bring true hope; it can bring security and a level of ease, but not true hope. A spouse can't bring true hope because a spouse's abilities are limited to what he or she can control. True hope comes from the One who created hope: God. True hope comes by trusting God even when circumstances are difficult. One way to know whether you're trusting God is whether you're obeying his Word. Trust produces obedience, which produces hope, which results in joy and peace; and that is the power of the Holy Spirit. *"May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."* Romans 15:13
- (4) Authentic Christian hope is a gift** - A wonderful result of hope is delivered by the Holy Spirit of God. He gives us the power to hope and that is a demonstration of God's love for us. Hope given by him works together to give us confidence, joy, peace, power and love. That is a true gift! *"And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been give to us."* Romans 5:5
- (5) Authentic Christian hope endures** - Hoping in God will never lead us into despair, because He has a plan for all of us who look to Him. He has a future that is full of hope. *"There is surely a future hope for you, and your hope will not be cut off."* Proverbs 23:18

## CONCLUSION

Someone has said, "Sincerity is the key to success. If you can fake that, you've got it made!" We're all prone to fake it, aren't we! It's not spiritually healthy to be overly introspective, but sometimes it is good to do an inside checkup. Paul exhorts (2 Cor. 13:5), "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" So, ask yourself, "Is my Christianity authentic or am I faking it?" Here are the tests:

Am I marked by *thankfulness* and *prayer*? Is my *faith in Jesus Christ* and *His gospel*? Am I working at genuine *love* for all of God's people, especially those I rub shoulders with every day? Am I motivated in all I do by the *hope* laid up for me in heaven?

Perfection in these things is not required or possible in this life. But to be authentic Christians, we should be working at and making progress in thankfulness and prayer; faith in Christ and the gospel; love for one another; and the hope laid up for us in heaven.

Where do you need to grow the most: thankfulness, prayer, faith in Christ, love for others, or hope? What's your plan?

### **The 7 Biblical Marks of an Authentic Christian**

The words of the Lord Jesus Christ are clear on what it really means to be His disciple, a Christian. There is scarcely any room for misunderstanding if we will accept what He says at face value. Here are the terms as communicated by the Savior Himself:

1. **A supreme love for Jesus Christ (Luke 14:26)** - <sup>“26</sup> *“If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.”*
2. **A denial of self (Matt. 16:24)** – <sup>“24</sup> *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*
3. **A deliberate choosing of the cross (Matt. 16:24)** - <sup>“24</sup> *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*
4. **A life spent following Christ (Matt. 16:24)** - <sup>“24</sup> *Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.”*
5. **A fervent love for all who belong to Christ (John 13:35)** – <sup>“35</sup> *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”*
6. **And unswerving continuance in His Word (John 8:31)** – <sup>“31</sup> *Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.”*
7. **A forsaking of all to follow Him (Luke 14:33)** – <sup>“33</sup> *So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.”*